

Cricket 167

Chapter 167

The afternoon sun cast long shadows across the Adelaide Oval, its golden rays illuminating the determined faces of Aarav and Virat Kohli as they resumed their innings. The scoreboard read 136/2, with Aarav on 79* and Kohli on 15*. The crowd buzzed with anticipation, sensing the brewing storm of a formidable partnership.

Aarav's POV:

The pitch had settled into a docile rhythm, offering little assistance to the bowlers. Yet, the Australian attack, led by Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon, remained relentless. I knew that patience and precision would be our allies in this phase.

As Lyon began his spell in the 35th over, I faced him with a calm mind. He floated the ball just outside off, and I gently nudged it into the gap between point and cover. It was an easy single, but Virat and I had other plans. We sprinted hard, pushing for two. Our eyes met mid-pitch, a silent agreement passed between us. We stretched, dove, and completed the second run, drawing applause from the crowd.

Commentary Box:

Harsha Bhogle: "Brilliant running between the wickets! Aarav and Kohli are turning ones into twos, putting immense pressure on the fielders."

Isa Guha: "It's not just about boundaries; this is intelligent cricket, exploiting every opportunity."

Kohli's POV:

In the 38th over, Cummins charged in with renewed vigor. I met his delivery with a firm push down the ground. Aarav responded instantly, and we set off. As we turned for the second run, a misfield by Travis Head at mid-on offered us a bonus. We seized the moment, sprinting for a third run amidst the cheers of the spectators.

Commentary Box:

Ricky Ponting: "That's exceptional awareness from Kohli and Aarav. They're not just batting; they're orchestrating this innings."

Sunil Gavaskar: "This partnership is a masterclass in running between the wickets. It's a joy to watch."

As the overs progressed, boundaries became scarce, but our resolve didn't waver. We focused on rotating the strike, converting singles into doubles, and keeping the scoreboard ticking. The Australian bowlers toiled, but our partnership grew stronger, built on trust, communication, and relentless energy.

Score Update:

India: 167/2 Aarav: 90* (120 balls) Virat Kohli: 35* (60 balls)

The sun began its descent, casting a warm glow over the stadium. Our partnership stood unbroken, a testament to the power of perseverance and the art of running between the wickets.

The 41st over was about to begin, and the crowd at Adelaide Oval buzzed with a curious mix of tension, admiration, and sheer anticipation. The sky wore a golden hue, the soft amber light of the setting sun kissing the tops of the grandstands, casting long shadows across the pitch. The scoreboard displayed: India at 189/2. And standing tall on the crease, unwavering, was Aarav—anchored at 90 runs off 131 gritty, determined deliveries. Every run had been earned, carved, willed into existence.

He had batted through relentless bowling spells, sledges flying like arrows, and the psychological weight of expectations hanging over him like a thundercloud. But here he was. Just ten away. A decade of dreams, sweat, and sacrifice condensed into the next few deliveries.

Nathan Lyon, the wily off-spinner, strolled up to his mark with quiet determination. He adjusted the field with microscopic precision. Silly point inched closer. Mid-off took a step back. Deep square leg came into the circle. It was a calculated chess move—box him in, build pressure, force a mistake.

From behind the stumps, Tim Paine decided to take the verbal route again.

"What's going on, Aarav? Nineties got you in a trance, mate? Need a few tips? Might help you push that scoreboard, eh?"

Aarav turned, the bat lightly resting on his pad, and gave a smile— and continued.

"If I ever need tips, Tim," he replied, his voice like velvet lined with steel, "why would I ask you? When the best batsman in the world is standing right in front of me? You know him, right? King Kohli. So no thanks—I think I'll manage without help from someone like you."

Lyon chuckled softly, already back at his mark. Paine had no comeback.

Aarav's POV:

I closed my eyes for a second. Just one breath. The crowd faded away. The thousands of voices became background static. It was me, the bat, and the ball. I tapped my bat twice. Lyon began his run-up.

The first ball was teasingly wide outside the off-stump. I let it pass, watched as it spun harmlessly into Paine's gloves. My feet didn't move. My eyes never blinked.

"One ball down," I whispered under my breath, almost ritualistically.

The second delivery. Lyon floated it right in my arc. My muscle memory took over—I stepped out, confident. The bat met the ball, but not with the sweet kiss of the middle. It caught the edge—thick and firm—but enough. The ball traveled like a laser straight down the ground. One bounce. Four.

Commentary Box:

Harsha Bhogle: "That wasn't clean—but the power! Straight as an arrow, and Aarav moves to 94. He's keeping his nerve."

Ricky Ponting: "You know, that wasn't even off the middle. That's strength and willpower right there. He wants that hundred, and he's earning every bit of it."

I took a long look around. Banners waving. Flags rising. Somewhere in the crowd, I imagined the faces of those who believed in me. I turned back to face Lyon.

Third ball. I stayed grounded, cautious. Lyon tossed it again, flighted, inviting. I punched it straight to cover.

"No run."

"Damn it," I muttered. That shot was there. The gap. The placement. And I missed it. I clenched my jaw, tightened my grip. I couldn't let emotion cloud me. Not now.

Fourth ball. Lyon released it with extra loop. I saw it early, read the length. I stepped out, reached to the pitch, and swung.

CRACK!

The sound echoed like a gunshot.

The ball soared—no spin, no dip, just an elegant parabola that climbed higher, and higher... and out of the stadium. Beyond the sight screen. Into the crowd. Disappeared.

Commentary Box:

Isa Guha: "HE'S LAUNCHED IT! That's outta here! Aarav brings up his hundred in stunning style!"

Sunil Gavaskar: "A six to remember for life! The way he picked the length, the footwork, the timing—magnificent! That's a superstar in the making."

I stood still. Breathing heavy. I removed my helmet and bowed. A humble gesture, something I'd practiced as a child in front of the mirror. Then I knelt. Placed the helmet on the ground with reverence. Followed by my gloves.

Around my right wrist, now fully visible to the world, was a red scarf. Slightly frayed. I kissed it gently.

A promise fulfilled.

A tribute.

The cameras zoomed in. Commentators went silent for a few moments, letting the image speak.

I stood, arms wide. One holding the bat. The other raised toward the sky. A century. In Australia. On debut.

Kohli was there in a flash.

He wrapped his arms around me. His smile was wide, proud.

"This is just the beginning, champ," he whispered in my ear. "First of many. Come on!"

We laughed. We high-fived. I couldn't stop smiling.

Commentary Box:

Harsha Bhogle: "This—this right here—is why we love cricket. A young man, on the biggest stage, showing maturity beyond years. Aarav Pathak, remember the name."

Mathew Wade: "Technique. Temperament. Timing. And the flair to cap it with a six. That's box-office stuff."

Crowd Reaction:

The Indian section of the crowd went wild—flags, drums, whistles. Even neutral Aussies stood up. Clapped. Acknowledged greatness.

In the dressing room, Prithvi and Mayank rose to their feet. Saha gave a standing ovation. Coaches applauded. And somewhere, miles away, televisions in Indian households erupted in joy.

Kohli's POV:

As I watched Aarav soak in the adoration, I felt nothing but warmth. He had done what few could. A century in testing conditions. Under scrutiny. With grace.

It wasn't just talent. It was heart. Pure, unfiltered heart.

Back on the Pitch:

The over concluded. India at 197/2. Aarav unbeaten at 100*. Kohli calmly on 58*. But the numbers barely mattered.

I raised my bat once more to the crowd, then pointed to the dressing room. To the people who made me believe. I looked down at the scarf again. The one tied for a loved one who never got to see this day.

But I knew.

They were watching.

TENDULKAR HOUSE POV: -

The warm afternoon sun filtered through the large French windows of the Tendulkar household, casting golden shafts of light onto the polished wooden floor. The soft hum of ceiling fans blended with the muted sounds of a live Test match on TV.

Shradha Tendulkar sat cross-legged on the oversized beige couch, a bowl of half-eaten popcorn beside her, her eyes glued to the TV screen. India was playing Australia at the Adelaide Oval, and the tension was palpable. Her fingers clutched the edge of a cushion, knuckles white, heart racing with every delivery bowled. The camera panned to the batsman at the crease—Aarav Pathak. Her boyfriend. Her secret.

He looked every bit the part—Handsome and sexy man, eyes narrowed in concentration, bat swinging like a sword through air. His stance was confident yet relaxed, and with each stroke, he seemed to write poetry on the pitch. Shradha's heart fluttered like it did when they first met, and a dreamy smile tugged at her lips.

"Oh my god," she whispered, unable to take her eyes off him. "He's so hot when he bats. hmmm I just love him too much!"

In her dreamy trance, she smiled to herself, twirling a strand of her hair, entirely unaware of the sharp, questioning eyes fixed on her from the other side of the room.

"What do you love, Shradha?"

The voice startled her like a bouncer catching her off guard. She turned and froze mid-motion.

It was her father—the Sachin Tendulkar.

He was lounging comfortably on the recliner, sipping coffee from his well-worn Team India mug, the aroma of freshly brewed filter coffee still lingering in the air. His eyes twinkled with curiosity, a smirk dancing at the corners of his lips. For a moment, her mind went blank. A hundred thoughts rushed through, but none formed complete sentences. Panic set in. She had been too obvious. Too open.

Shradha laughed nervously, trying to mask the blush rising on her cheeks. "Test cricket, Dad! I mean, how amazing it is, right? Just pure cinema. You never know what's going to happen next!"

Sachin chuckled, amused by her quick recovery. "Of course! Test cricket is the best format. It tests everything—technique, temperament, and patience. Nothing compares. That's where the real heroes are made."

She nodded enthusiastically, trying to match his cricketing passion with her own fake composure, though her mind was spinning.

Play it cool, Shradha. Just don't give anything away. Not even a blink.

Sachin leaned forward, now animated with memories. "You know, back in my day, some of the fiercest battles happened in Tests. There was a certain romance to it—facing McGrath's precision, Warne's mystery, or Shoaib's sheer speed. It was a duel. A war. And today, look at Lyon versus Aarav—that's proper cricket."

Shradha forced a smile, nodding along, while her brain was screaming: He said Aarav. Don't react. Don't react.

Suddenly, her elder sister Sara, perched at the dining table with her sleek silver laptop open and a smoothie in hand, looked up from an article she was half-reading and half-writing. "Why is only Aarav given so many chances anyway?" she asked, her tone not malicious but laced with casual curiosity. "There are so many other young players—Shubman Gill...."

She trailed off as she caught their father staring at her, amusement and interest flickering in his eyes. Shradha, on the other hand, nearly bit through her bottom lip trying not to burst into laughter.

Sara seeing she had been caught continued: Ruturaj, even Arjun... and even others

Sara folded her arms. "What? It's a valid question."

Sachin shook his head with a soft chuckle. "Don't worry, beta. Everyone gets their chance if they're good. But these aren't just 'chances' Aarav's getting. He's earned his place. Look at his stats—fastest to 1,000 ODI runs, 994 in a single IPL season, and he practically carried RCB to their first-ever cup. That's not ordinary talent. That's special."

He paused the TV briefly, rewound to a highlight reel of Aarav smashing a cover drive that whistled past the fielder like a missile. Shradha's heart did a somersault.

"And now, look at him," Sachin continued, eyes fixed on the screen. "A debut Test in Australia, and he's nearing a hundred. That's not luck. That's preparation meeting opportunity."

Shradha couldn't hide her pride. Her back straightened, her chest puffed slightly as if the compliments were directed at her. Her heart screamed with joy.

How cool is my boyfriend? Ohhh, so cool! She squealed—internally.

Sara rolled her eyes. "Still feels like favoritism," she muttered, sipping her smoothie.

Sachin smiled, tapping his fingers rhythmically on the side of his mug. "Talent can't be hidden for long, Sara. Whether it's me, Virat, or now Aarav—if you've got it, the game will find you."

The room gradually fell into silence as the match reached a crescendo. The tension on TV was mounting. Aarav was on 94. The Adelaide crowd was on the edge of their seats. The commentary was feverish.

Then, it happened.

A flighted delivery by Nathan Lyon.

Aarav danced down the track, met the ball with perfect timing—

SIX!

The ball sailed over long-on, into the stands, a clean hit that echoed in stadiums and hearts alike.

Shradha screamed.

"YES! YES! SO COOL!" she shouted, jumping off the couch, hands flailing like a schoolgirl seeing her crush in real life.

Sachin and Sara clapped, calm and dignified. Veterans of the game. But Shradha—she was a storm of emotions.

And then, everything paused.

Aarav took off his helmet. He knelt. Removed his gloves.

On his wrist—nothing but a single deep red scarf.

Shradha's breath caught in her throat.

The scarf.

The one she had tied onto his wrist the night before he flew to Australia. "For luck," she had whispered, pressing it into his palm with a kiss.

And now, on national television, he kissed it.

Shradha's expression softened. The adrenaline melted into something deeper—something warm, quiet, and sacred. She slowly sank back onto the couch, her face glowing, hands folded in her lap, lips curved into a silent, knowing smile. A blush crept across her cheeks. She giggled softly, not daring to speak.

From the corner of her eye, she noticed Sara looking at her. Then Sachin. Their eyes met in a brief moment of realization, like two detectives sensing a clue.

But neither said a word.

They turned back to the TV as Kohli hugged Aarav, the stadium exploded in applause, and the commentators lost their voices in awe.

Yet inside the Tendulkar living room, an entirely different story was unfolding. One of glances, of withheld truths, and unsaid feelings.

Shradha remained quiet, her poker face now fully activated. But inside, her heart was dancing a garba.

He kissed the scarf.

He remembered.

And in that moment, surrounded by family, amongst national glory, cricketing excellence, and hidden love, Shradha Tendulkar had never felt more validated. More treasured.

She glanced once more at the screen. Aarav was raising his bat high, acknowledging the crowd.

And she smiled.

A secret not shouted but shown.

In runs.

In red scarves.

In cricket.

In love.

How was this new Shradha and family POV just tell me!